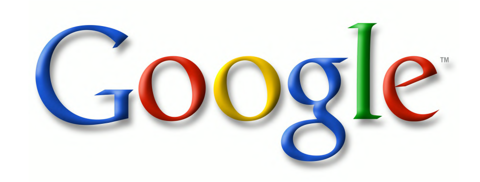


# The Ring of the Nibelungs.


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# The Ring of the Nibelungs.

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With the regards o
Jno. R. G. Hassa



RICHARD WAGNER AT BAYREUTH.

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THE

# RING OF THE NIBELUNGS



A DESCRIPTION OF ITS FIRST PERFORMANCE
IN AUGUST, 1876.

BY

JOHN R. G. HASSARD.

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[REPRINTED FROM THE N. Y. TRIBUNE.]

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# THE RING OF THE NIBELUNGS.

[*Reprinted from the New-York Tribune.*]

## I.

### BAYREUTH—THE PREPARATIONS.

BAYREUTH, Bavaria, Aug. 12, 1876.—The pilgrim from a far country, who reaches this remote little town after much changing about from one slow railroad to another, and sees, on a hillside as he approaches the station, the queer theater of dusky red and yellow, a skeleton frame of wood built in with bricks and resting on a stone basement, is lost at first in wonder that a place like Bayreuth should have been chosen for the most remarkable musical enterprise and one of the greatest experiments in art that the world has ever seen. Bayreuth lies near the borders of that interesting region of stalactitic caverns known as the Franconian Switzerland, but it has no curiosities of its own, and it is out of the routes of travel. It is ancient, but most of its antique buildings were long ago destroyed. It has some historical reminiscences of pleasure-loving margraves who held a festive court here, and whose palaces and gardens are still in better or worse repair, and of Jean Paul, whose statue adorns one of the public squares, and whose room, in a little suburban inn, is shown to strangers; but for these things the ordinary tourist cares little. The hotels are small and unpretending, and the city possesses only seven carriages which can be made to do duty as hacks, so that when the festival season began vehicles were borrowed from Nuremberg, from Würzburg, and from all the surrounding cities; without a wholly satisfactory result, however, for

here all the horses and men seem to be in the army, while the work is done by the women and cows. To a traveler it appears that Bayreuth is nothing except what Wagner makes it. Pictures of the master hang in every shop window, and are stamped upon cigar-boxes and covers of beer-mugs. His house, in the estimation of the inhabitants, is the principal monument of the town. It is a low square building of yellowish stone, set back a hundred or a hundred and fifty feet from the road, and surrounded by a garden. Beans and potatoes bloom around you as you walk up the sandy path from the high iron gate to the front door, and the pleasure-grounds are in the rear, where the household is screened from curious eyes. The house stands at the end of the principal street of Bayreuth, and to reach it you must pass through a zone of bad smells such as one usually finds on the outskirts of a town. All day, till the hour of rehearsal is near, a stream of people moves toward the composer's "Wahnfried," and a valet stands at the half open door to answer their inquiries. Liszt is there, and one can see him now and then of a morning, driving about the city with his daughter Frau Wagner. Herr Wagner himself often drives in an open barouche, sometimes alone, sometimes in company with two or three of the titled personages, especially of the gentler sex, who make a little court in which he and Liszt are the reigning powers. Heads are uncovered when he passes, and he returns the salute. Stand for a few minutes about mid-day in the square at the center of the town, and what a curious panorama moves before you. All the principal singers of Germany and some of the first musicians of the world are in that laughing and bustling throng. Wotan chats with the other denizens of Walhalla, and the Walkyries and Rhine-Daughters show their honest and not uncomely faces among the crowd. They are pleasant divinities, and I never saw but one of them out of temper, and she was a distin-

guished goddess to whom the hotel people gave at supper last night a bottle of stale beer. Here are musicians and amateurs of almost every nation, Russians, Englishmen, Servians, Norsemen, and Americans in great number, even from the Pacific coast. And the Bavarian peasantry, with their odd costumes and amazingly ugly faces, come in from the surrounding country to stare at the unaccustomed sight.

For several weeks the quaint streets have been in holiday attire, the crowds have grown steadily larger, the difficulty of getting food and lodging more serious. Before the festival approached a mark and a half a day (37 cents) was a good price for lodgings without board, even in the best hotels. Now 14 or 15 marks are charged for indifferent accommodations, and rooms are hard to find even at that price. Last night I saw a gentleman sitting in the roadway on a pile of luggage for which he could find no shelter, and all the day before people had been running frantically about town in vain search of even the meanest bed. The "lodgings committee" organized to find homes for strangers seems to have done its work carefully and systematically for all who sought its assistance in advance, but too many people have come here without warning, only to find that the rooms are all gone. Among these improvident pilgrims I am sorry to say are many of my own countrymen. I have met twenty-five or thirty acquaintances of my own from New-York, and several from Boston, and the number of Americans in town yesterday was said to be over a hundred and fifty—a number which will be greatly increased before the festival closes. Among the musical people best known in our own city who have already arrived are Miss Anna Mehlig, Miss Minnie Hauck, Mrs. Schirmer, Dr. Damrosch, Mr. von Inten, Mr. Korbay, Mr. B. J. Lang, Mr. Max Pinner, Mr. Theodore Steinway, Mr. A. Neuendorff, Mr. Federlein, Mr.

Carl Klauser. Mr. Wiebusch, and Mr. Candidus. England sends Sir Julius Benedict, Randegger, and the small party of musicians of the future represented by Walter Bache, Edward Dannreuther, and one or two others. Germany—you might count upon the fingers of one hand all the most noted German musicians who are *not* here. The railway station for the past two days has been half given up to the reception of dignitaries, who have come in such numbers that I cannot undertake to catalogue them. The King of Bavaria witnessed all the last rehearsals, and then slipped away in the night, after sending a handsome letter of congratulation to the artists. At 4 o'clock this afternoon the Grand Duke of Weimar came in state, and Liszt was waiting at the station to receive him. At 5 the excitement culminated with the arrival of the Emperor William, attended by a very large suite. He came in a special train from Gastein, expressly to witness the first performance; and considering how notorious is his distaste for music, his coming ought to be counted as one of the chief of Wagner's victories. The composer welcomed him at the platform, and after a brief delay for ceremonious civilties the Emperor entered one of the ten imperial carriages sent here the day before, and was driven to the Hermitage Palace, two miles away. The cortege was simple enough. A hundred firemen in brass imitations of Malbrino's helmet, short drab coats, and trousers *à discretion*, kept a space clear about the station, and there was no escort. The whole population, however, was in the streets cheering, and the heartiest possible demonstrations were made in front of the palace. The Grand Duke of Baden came to-day, and our good friend Dom Pedro of Brazil is said to be quartered at one of the hotels.

King Ludwig of Bavaria arrived a week ago, between Saturday and Sunday. His Majesty, as all the world knows, is peculiar in his ways, and it suited him to come by special train from Munich in



the middle of the night. He did not enter the city at all, notwithstanding that it had been elaborately decorated with flags and greens in his honor, but alighted in the suburbs, opposite the Jean Paul inn, and thence was driven to the fantastic little garden palace known as the Hermitage, built by Margrave George William, 150 years ago. The King likes to listen to music alone, so it was arranged that the final dress rehearsals of the great Nibelungen Trilogy should be given as a special performance for his benefit, and orders were issued that no one whatever should be admitted except the royal party. Orders of this kind, however, are not always carried out to the letter. There is a low and narrow gallery over the King's box, where a few privileged spectators could neither see the King nor be seen by him, and a handful of people—Liszt conspicuous among them—were admitted to seats on the floor, next to the orchestra. It was my good fortune to be one of the favored few on Sunday night at this exceptionally private rehearsal of "Rheingold," the prologue to the trilogy. We got in early in the evening, just as the soldiers began to clear the open space in front of the theater in preparation for the coming of the King, and we sat in darkness for more than an hour admiring the wonderful art with which the theater is adapted for its purpose. It is almost entirely without ornament, except what it derives from its excellent architectural proportions. The proscenium is painted of a somber, dusky tint; the ceiling is flat, with frescoes of a neutral shade; the benches are plain, with cane seats, and rise with a steep ascent, in rows but slightly curved, the front row being just the length of the proscenium, the rear nearly twice as long, but all the spectators so placed that they have a clear view of the entire stage. There are no bad seats. At the rear of the benches is the box for the King and other high dignitaries. The auditorium is small, having a capacity of only 1,500, and the width of the proscenium

is not remarkable, but the stage itself is of enormous breadth and depth, while a huge loft for the working of the machinery towers above it, and a cellar for the same purpose goes deep below. There are no lights in the auditorium, except a few near the ceiling at the sides and rear, and these are almost entirely extinguished before the curtain is drawn. If one had a libretto, therefore, it would be impossible to follow it during the play. In Wagner's dramas the attention must be concentrated on the stage. Even the orchestra and conductor are out of sight, down in the "mystic gulf" which separates the spectators from the actors. A shelf projecting over the heads of the players hides them and their leader from the house, but they are visible of course to those on the stage.

Twenty minutes after the appointed hour of 7 a sudden hush fell upon our little gathering. Nobody seemed to know whence the signal came, but the word somehow ran around that His Majesty had arrived. We heard cheers from the people outside; a door opened and closed, and we felt that the darkness was more oppressive and mysterious than ever. Then Wagner, behind the scenes, gave a quick shout of command; the orchestra began. I do not intend to anticipate in this letter the full account of the play, which I shall send you after the regular performance. Here I merely set down the first impression produced by a rehearsal, which differed in no essential respect from a public representation except in the absence of spectators. It is enough to say that all my previous ideas of what a Wagner opera might be were set at naught. The most extravagant expectations were more than realized. "Rheingold" is better known than the other parts of the work, but nobody who has not seen it here can form a conception of its unearthly beauties, its stupendous and always increasing effects. It flows on, without pause or division into acts, for nearly two hours and a half, and during

all that time we sat spell-bound, our eyes fixed upon the wonderful spectacle, our ears drinking in the strange sounds. It was a hot night, and the theater is entirely without ventilation; but we forgot the stifling air, and when the curtain fell at last upon the closing scene where the gods cross over the rainbow bridge to their gorgeous castle in the clouds, we seemed to awake from a dream of delight, and wondered at the flight of time. We had entered the theater by daylight; it was nearly 10 o'clock when, silent and thoughtful, we groped our way out, and then a fresh surprise awaited us.. The whole city was illuminated. Rows of lights gleamed along the mile of road which leads from the theater down to the town. From the hill where we stood Bayreuth was visible in its full extent, bathed in light. The façades of the public buildings were all traced in lines of fire—for illuminations in this part of the world, unlike our own, are always arranged with ingenious architectural effects. A minute later, and the royal coach dashed by. A servant on horseback rode ahead, with a lantern attached to a pole. A plain close carriage followed, with servants in simple livery, and we caught merely a glimpse of a dark young man inside, a few score of men and boys running in disorderly fashion alongside and cheering faintly, and two or three policemen panting in their rear.

The next day the King graciously permitted Herr Wagner to let in all the world to the dress rehearsal of the "Walküre," and so at 5 o'clock the theater was entirely filled. When everything was ready the composer appeared in the King's box and informed the audience, which was standing in expectation of King Ludwig's entrance (for the shout of welcome had just been heard outside), that His Majesty allowed spectators to be present on the express condition that he should not be annoyed by any demonstrations; they were therefore to respect the royal wishes. So we took our seats, and after

the lights were put out the King slipped into his box unseen. The "Walküre" was even more effective and surprising than "Rheingold." I wish everybody who has admired "Siegmund's Love Song," the "Walküren Ritt," and "Wotan's Abschied" in New-York could have heard Niemann, Betz, and Frau Materna in those great numbers and witnessed the splendor of scenic decoration and dramatic action by which they were illustrated. The "Walküre," like the two subsequent parts of the work, is divided into three acts, and between the acts there are intermissions of nearly an hour, during which the people go out for beer and fresh air. There is no applause either during or after the music, no recognition of individual singers, and of course no talking or other disturbance among the audience. But when everything is over for the night, then the pent-up feelings find enthusiastic expression. Before the second act that night Herr Wagner went into the "mystic gulf," and, invisible to the audience, but distinctly heard, made a speech of compliment and thanks to his orchestra. And they richly deserved it, for their work is magnificent. They are under the direction of Hans Richter, and the first violin is played by the distinguished virtuoso Wilhelmj. The men are selected with great care from the best orchestras of Germany, and the composition of the band is as follows: 1st and 2d violins, 32; violas, 12; violoncelli, 12; basses, 8; flutes, 4; hautboys, 4; English horn, 1; clarinets, 3; bass clarinet, 1; bassoons, 4; contrafagotto, 1; horns, 7; tenor and bass tubas, 4; trumpets, 3; bass trumpet, 1; trombones, 4; contra-bass trombone, 1; contra-bass tuba, 1; drums, 3; harps, 8; organ, 1; total, 116. It will be seen that there are several instruments here not usually employed in the orchestra, including the obsolete bass trumpet which Wagner put in his Philadelphia Inauguration March. The organ is a little instrument of merely seven deep bass notes, used to support the

contra-bass tuba in the introduction to "Rheingold" and some other passages where there are long sustained notes for which the breath of no human being suffices. A newly-invented viola, considerably larger than the common instrument, is also employed. Under Richter's admirable and sympathetic direction this band of virtuosi interprets the score with the utmost delicacy, sentiment, and breadth of expression. Sinking it out of sight not only helps the illusions of the scene but promotes the complete blending of instruments and voices, so that the orchestra, though it comprises 116 instruments, is never noisy. It is not equal to the Thomas orchestra in unity or brilliancy or in the tone of some of the brasses, but the Thomas orchestra is one of the great ones of the world.

The singers are as follows:

"RHEINGOLD."

*Wotan*..................................Franz Betz
*Donner*..................................Eugen Gura
*Froh*..................................Georg Unger
*Loge*..................................Heinrich Vogel
*Alberich*..................................Carl Hill
*Mime*..................................Carl Schlosser
*Fasolt*..................................Albert Eilers
*Fafner*..................Franz von Reichenberg
*Fricka*..................................Friedericke Grün
*Freia*..................................Marie Haupt
*Erda*..................................Luise Jaïde
*The Rhine Daughters*....... { ...Lilli Lehmann / ..Marie Lehmann / ..Minna Lammert }

"DIE WALKURE."

*Siegmund*........................Albert Niemann
*Hunding*........................Joseph Niering
*Wotan*..................................Fr. Betz
*Sieglinde*..................Josephine Schefzky
*Brünnhilde*........................Amalie Materna
*Fricka*........................Friedericke Grün
*Valkyries*...... { ..................Marie Haupt / ..................Lilli Lehmann / ..................Marie Lehmann / ..................Luise Jaïde / ..................Antoinie Amann / ..................Minna Lammert / Hedwig Reicher-Kindermann / Johanna Jachmann-Wagner }

"SIEGFRIED."

| | |
|---|---|
| *Siegfried* | Georg Unger |
| *Mime* | Carl Schlosser |
| *The Wanderer* | Fr. Betz |
| *Alberich* | Carl Hill |
| *Fafner* | Franz von Reichenberg |
| *Erda* | Luise Jaïde |
| *Brünnhilde* | Amalie Materna |

"GOTTERDAMMERUNG."

| | |
|---|---|
| *Siegfried* | Georg Unger |
| *Gunther* | Eugen Gura |
| *Hagen* | Gustav Siehr |
| *Alberich* | Carl Hill |
| *Brünnhilde* | Amalie Materna |
| *Gutrune* | Mathilde Weckerlin |
| *Waltraute* | Luise Jaïde |
| *The Nornes* | Johanna Jachmann-Wagner |
| | Josephine Schefzky |
| | Friedericke Grün |
| *The Rhine Daughters* | As before |

The chorus appears only in the "Götterdämmerung." It consists of 28 men and 10 women.

It was a great achievement for one man to force a new theory of art upon a reluctant world, and not only that, but to persuade the world to build him a costly theater for its exhibition. Some of the peculiarities of the Wagner theater are already well understood in the United States. The scenic effects however cannot be adequately described without a much more eloquent pen than mine. There is nothing comparable to them even in our best theaters. The flat picture let down at the back and made to do duty as a house, or a field, or a river, as the case may be, is unknown here. Every scene is *built up* with the most minute attention to details. There are no wings, but the realistic construction of the scene is continued along the sides and down to the front. There are no flapping borders overhead, but tree, sky, or roof goes up as high as the eye can reach. The stage is not lighted in the usual way from the wings, borders and foot-lights, but by some contrivance which I do not understand a light seems to be diffused over the whole scene. Sometimes it comes from the back. Moreover, the light is con-

tinually changing. Night and day, sunshine and storm, follow each other by nice gradations, and even when all the action takes place by day there are shifting lights and shadows as there are in nature. The cloud effects are beautiful, and Wagner employs them freely. Transparent vapors float over the heavens with incessant motion, or hover around the rocky steeps. For this purpose very thin painted gauzes are used. For heavier exhalations an illusion is produced by clouds of steam. A scene is never raised or lowered in sight of the audience; when a change becomes necessary during the progress of an act, clouds settle gradually over the picture, dropping gently from above, while steam rises from a crevice in the stage; and when the atmosphere clears the change has been made. It is by means of steam, reddened by reflected light, and shot here and there with small flames, that the effects of fire are produced, of which I shall have to speak hereafter. All the illusions are hightened by the utter darkness of the auditorium, and the great distance between the front row of seats and the curtain. The scene-painting is magnificent. Every picture shows the sentiment and hand of an artist in idea and treatment. There is none of the false brilliancy and glaring color of the conventional stage decorator; the painting is not theatrical at all, but it is truthful. The costumes, upon which Wagner has spent great pains and enormous sums of money, are not only brilliant, but they are poetical. Finally, the actors, though differing in degrees of merit, are all imbued with the spirit of the drama and the music. Not one of them thinks of such a thing as singing to the audience, or coming down to the front. Here is indeed a remarkable gathering of distinguished artists, and none of us are likely to see such an assemblage again.

During the dress rehearsals Wagner sat with the King. Heretofore, of course, he has been on the stage, and he is said to have displayed astonishing

ingenuity and force in directing the dramatic action and gestures. "Ah," exclaimed one of the artists the other day, "if we could only do these things like him!" The expenses have greatly exceeded the estimates of the undertaking, and amount to not less than five hundred thousand thalers, though most of the artists perform without pay. There is a deficiency of nearly two hundred thousand, a large part of which will probably be made up by receipts from the third series of performances, for which there are many places yet unsold. But whatever the pecuniary results, there is no doubt that the performance of "The Ring of the Niblungs" is one of the most stupendous triumphs of the age.

At a rehearsal recently the orchestra played our Centennial March before getting to work on the trilogy. I am told that it has also been played here by the military band in the Palace Park.

## II.

## PROLOGUE—THE RHINE-GOLD.

BAYREUTH, Aug. 13.—The experiment which is moving to its triumphant close in Bayreuth is the most remarkable that has ever been made either in music or in any of its sister arts. It is the attempt of a single man to reconstruct according to his own ideas not only the forms of the opera after they have been long established by the common consent of all civilized nations, but indirectly many of the rules of musical composition in general, the fashions of the stage, and to some extent the methods of all dramatic poetry. The opera of France and Italy is a product of slow growth upon which brilliant musicians like Mozart and Rossini and innovators like Gluck have successively left a more or less durable impress. Wagner has undertaken, however, not to

modify but to destroy and rebuild. His success means nothing less than revolution.

The nature of his work has been so fully explained in THE TRIBUNE heretofore that I need not now discuss it in detail. Briefly, he finds music, poetry, dramatic action, and pictorial illustration, which were all combined in the theater of the old Greeks, now unnaturally divided, and all suffering from the separation. In the opera the music, so called, has usurped everything and become degraded in its isolation; we have a string of unmeaning arias and dry recitatives to which the poet is asked to supply nothing but a scaffolding of more or less stupid words. Wagner has undertaken to reunite the long separated arts, and make them join on equal terms in the expression of the poetic emotion. In fact, according to him, every art reaches a point of development where it can go no further alone, but demands the help of another art to complete its utterance. Verse has been ennobled and refined until it almost melts into music; Beethoven in his Choral Symphony attained a hight where the resources of the orchestra failed him, and he had to invoke the aid of the poet. Following out this principle, Wagner reached the conclusion that the ideal musical drama was one in which poet and composer should work together by a single impulse toward the expression of one identical emotion. Verse and melody would then surrender each some of its exclusive claims for the sake of the greater effect to be produced by their perfect combination. Thus he was led by degrees to abandon the set aria and the formal recitative altogether and substitute for them a kind of "continuous melody" which lent itself readily to the expression of the most varied and rapidly changing emotions. Every thought, I may say every word, came to have its appropriate musical phrase; every prominent idea in the drama was distinguished by its own succession of musical sounds, called the "leading motive,"

generally heard in the orchestra, and repeated frequently as the idea recurred; and these motives and phrases were continually elaborated and combined in the most beautiful and ingenious ways. In a word, Wagner turned into the opera the full rich stream of the music of Beethoven; and what he says of the construction of this master's symphonies may be said with equal truth of the construction of his own operas: "The entirely new result of this method was the development of melody by the most perfect elaboration of all the *motives* contained in it, with a great and lasting musical work which was, in fine, nothing else but one single closely connected melody." In this greater melody the conventional "tune" entirely disappeared; the set scena and cabaletta, the ordinary operatic aria with its introduction, andante, and allegro in regular sequence, the aria di bravura, the display pieces for each of the principal vocalists in turn, the recitativo which filled the intervals between the tunes, the duet and the noisy finale were all swept away together. The "continuous melody" was bound by no rules, but followed freely the poetic impulse of the poet.

The theory of Wagner has been accepted within a few years by so many of the best musicians and by such a large proportion of the unlearned public that there has been little doubt of its ultimate recognition, at least in its main points, by all the world of art. The only serious question to be solved here at Bayreuth was as to Wagner's own application of the theory. For it was well known that in "The Ring of the Nibelungs" he had carried his principles much further than in any of the earlier works. He had abandoned even such relics of the old operatic forms as we find in "Lohengrin," and pushed his revolutionary projects to their very last extent. There was doubt therefore whether, like other reformers, he had not been betrayed into extravagance by too much zeal. A great many unprejudiced persons shook their heads ominously over the prospect of

four days of "continuous melody," and an opera which told at such stupendous length an intricate myth of gods, and volsungs, and daughters of the Rhine. Let me satisfy doubtful inquirers at once: the performance is one of the most stupendous successes the stage has ever witnessed. The most extravagant expectations which have been formed abroad of the effect of this music, sung as the composer meant it should be sung, with the aid of the best acting, the most magnificent stage effects, and an orchestra of exceptional size and beauty, are very far surpassed by the reality. Familiar as we deem ourselves in New-York with Wagner's music, I must confess after this that we do not begin to know it. I do not express my own opinion only; I reflect the judgment of every man and woman I have seen—and I have talked with those of many nations and of various musical tastes—when I say that nothing in the remotest degree approaching the grandeur and effectiveness of what we are now hearing has ever been presented on the lyric stage. The victory is overwhelming.

It was a victory won in the presence of a most brilliant company of spectators. The long *Fürstenloge*, or Box of the Princes, extending entirely across the theater at the back of the auditorium, was filled with noble personages, the old Emperor in the middle, grand dukes, duchesses, court officials and titled ladies all about him. Most of the audience were in full evening dress, and the scene reminded me much more of a fashionable metropolitan opera season than of a hot Summer in this remote little Bavarian city. There were tremendous cheers at the entrance of the Emperor, the whole multitude rising to welcome him, and his majesty stood bowing for some time before quiet was restored. At length the trumpet blast was heard which serves here as the signal; the lights were immediately turned down, and the poem of "The Ring of the Nibelungs" began.

Wagner believes that the best possible subject for a musical drama is the popular legend or myth, because it leaves the poet and composer the greatest freedom in treatment, adapts itself naturally to dramatic purposes, and appeals at once to the emotional as distinguished from the intellectual nature of the spectator. Out of the old story of the nibelungs, the race which dwelt in the bowels of the earth and wrought in metals, he has constructed the text of his great trilogy. It is the story of a magical ring made by the nibelungs from the stolen treasure of the Rhine. Like the lust of gold, it brings a curse upon all who hold it. The gods obtain it from the nibelungs by force and fraud, and the overthrow of their race is the consequence. They cannot undo the wrong themselves have done, but they raise up a mortal hero who of his own free will shall accomplish the reparation; and Siegfried accordingly, though he himself falls a victim to the curse, is the means of restoring the ring to the Rhine-daughters, its original possessors. Then the power of the gods passes away, and gives place to human free will and intelligence. The story is told in a prologue and three parts, each occupying an entire evening. It is the prologue, "Rheingold," which I shall now try to describe.

The instrumental introduction depicted the restless movement of the deep river. It began away down in the lowest register of the contra bass-tuba, and flowed on, on, on, with the same simple chord of E flat, now rising, now falling, with increasing beauty and variety, till it changed rather abruptly into the graceful melody of the Rhine-daughters, and the curtain, drawn back to the sides, disclosed one of the most surprising scenes ever set forth in a theater. We looked into the obscure depths of the Rhine. The stage to its whole hight seemed to be filled with water. At the bottom were rugged rocks and dark caverns. Toward the top the waters were a little clearer, and a faint quiver-

ing light struggled through them from above. Seen across the dark theater with the wavy music coming up out of an invisible chasm between us and the river, like a wall of separation between reality and illusion, this far-away picture was like a vision. At first, in the dim and watery light, it was impossible to distinguish one shape from another. Little by little we became aware of graceful forms in flowing blue robes rising and sinking in the upper waters, gliding among the rocks with waving white arms, and calling to one another in a gentle and joyous melody. These were the three Rhine-daughters, guardians of the Rhine Gold. Nothing could be more charming than their frolic trio, embellished as it was by such wealth of instrumental illustration, such remarkable stage mechanism and poetical scenery. Here we saw at the very start the world-wide difference between the orchestra of Wagner with its freedom and eloquence of dramatic expression, and the "accompaniment" which sustains the voices in the old school of opera. Here indeed it may almost be said that individual performers in the band became as truly *dramatis personæ* as the actors on the stage. Soon the fluent character of this beautiful water music was disturbed by the introduction of a new theme, and in the increasing light we discerned the figure of Alberich the nibelung groping among the rocks in the bed of the river. He pursued the Rhine daughters with amorous eagerness, and they swam above him, sinking sometimes almost to his grasp, but always eluding it, and jeering at him with mock tenderness and merry laughter. The Alberich of Carl Hill, and the Rhine daughters personated by Lilli and Marie Lehmann and Minna Lammert, were all admirable both in voice and action. To the distant spectator the mechanism by which the motions of swimming and floating were so aptly counterfeited was entirely incomprehensible, and the illusion was perfect. I believe the women rested on

saddles supported by iron rods which their long drapery concealed. The motion was given from below. In the midst of the sport a bright light began to shine at the summit of the rocks, and suddenly, after a charming orchestral interlude, the glow of the gold broke forth from the point of a steep cliff, the horns giving out at the same moment a motive of great brilliancy and power. The music rapidly became more and more animated as the Rhine daughters greeted the apparition with joyous exclamations. They told Alberich of the wonderful power of this gold, which no one could obtain without renouncing forever the joys of love, and in the course of the dialogue two other motives, both to become important in the development of the drama, were successively introduced. The nibelung pronounced a curse upon love, and with violent effort reached the summit and seized the gold. The light was quenched. We could just see Alberich throw himself headlong from the rock into the deep, while the Rhine daughters with a cry of dismay—a modification of their first cheerful melody, changed into the minor key—sank from sight, and darkness settled over the scene. Here, during the rehearsals, the waters disappeared, almost imperceptibly, as if swallowed up in thick clouds, but to-night a blunder of the machinists marred the effect. The orchestra continued the work of dramatic illustration in a long and beautiful passage, changing gradually to more heroic strains, and as the music changed so the clouds too grew thin, vanished, and left open before us a beautiful morning landscape.

The foreground was a flowery field, supposed to represent a high table-land. A barrier of rock, overlooking the valley of the Rhine, bounded it in the rear, and in the distant background the gates and towers of Walhalla loomed indistinctly through the clouds. Wotan, the chief deity of the Norse mythology, slept on a grassy bank with his spouse Fricka

by his side. The splendor of the morning came forth as the orchestra played the magnificent passage which symbolizes the stately castle of the gods, and recurs in the course of the trilogy as one of the principal leading motives. Fricka awoke Wotan from his dreams to look at this stronghold which the giants had built for him while he slept. In a superb dialogue she reminded him that the builders would soon come to claim their promised reward, which was nothing less than the possession of Freia, the goddess of youth, and here we heard one of the most imposing as well as important of all the leading motives in the work, the ponderous descending scale in the bass indicating the law which binds the gods by their plighted word. The proud dignity of the "All-Father," beautifully expressed in the rich bass of Franz Betz, contrasted finely with the agitation of his spouse and the alarm of Freia, who entered hastily a few moments later and prayed for help against her pursuers. Following close upon her delicious melody we heard in the orchestra the measured tramp of the giants, Fafner and Fasolt, and their ungainly figures were seen climbing up from the valley and crossing over the rocks. The rest of this brilliant scene almost baffles description, and certainly to convey by letter any idea of the richness, force, and vividness of the music is quite out of the question. The giants insisted upon the terms of the bargain. The cries of Fricka and Freia, the threats of the brother gods Donner and Froh, the anger of Wotan, could not move them. Not daring to break his word, Wotan asked advice of Loge, the god of fire, and as this subtle character was introduced we heard the strains of the fire music so familiar to American audiences in connection with the finale of the "Walküre." Loge, in a melody of the most picturesque beauty, which called out untimely but irresistible applause, declared that there was nothing the gods could offer the giants in exchange for Freia, except the ring

forged by Alberich from the stolen treasure of the Rhine, thus formulating, so to speak, one of the chief ideas of the tragedy, which is the conflict between love and the lust of gold. After a magnificent passage, in which the "ring melody" asserted a marked prominence, and each of the divinities in turn asked characteristic questions respecting the power of the gold, the giants agreed to wait until evening for a final answer, taking Freia meanwhile as security.

Dragging after them the distressed goddess, Fafner and Fasolt, great hulking fellows, roughly clad and walking with big staves, climbed down the rocky descent and left the gods in melancholy thought. At once a gray mist settled upon the hights. The light faded. Everything began to wear an appearance of hoary age, for the gods had not tasted that day Freia's life-renewing apples. When they lamented their fading power Loge mocked at them, and at last Wotan agreed to accompany the fire-god to the abode of the dwarfs and take possession of the ring. This was the crime from which flowed all the misfortunes of the divine race and the tragedy of the drama.

As Loge, followed by Wotan, disappeared in a chasm of the rocks, a thick vapor issued from the opening and gradually overspread the whole scene. The vapor changed to dense clouds. The music of the orchestra became more animated; the fire-motive recurred; a deep red glow began to suffuse the clouds, and as they slowly dissolved we heard the hammering of anvils, and then there lay before us the subterranean caverns of the nibelungs, with a long vista of rock, at the extremity of which shone the gleam of forges. We saw Alberich beating his brother Mime, whom he had compelled to forge for him the tarn-helmet, gifted with the power of making the wearer invisible. He tried the helmet, and to the great terror of Mime vanished in a cloud, and then, during an orches-

tral interlude based upon the anvil melody, Wotan and Loge entered, coming down from above by an opening into the free air. Their scene with Mime was wonderful for its strong definitions of character, and the Mime of Carl Schlosser was enlivened by an amusing grotesqueness, particularly noticeable when in a rude rhythmic melody,

> "Sorglose Schmiede,
> Schufen wir sonst,"

with the anvil melody again in the accompaniment, he told Wotan and Loge of his once happy life and his sufferings under Alberich's blows. But if I undertook to describe all the incidents of this visit of the gods to Nebelheim I should soon exhaust your space if not your patience. Alberich was induced by the cunning Loge to exhibit the properties of the tarn-helmet. He disappeared, and in his place there was a hideous crawling creature. He disappeared again, and took the form of a toad. These two contrivances, I may remark, were the only commonplace theatrical devices of the evening, Wotan set his foot upon the toad; Loge grasped it by the head, the helmet came away in his hands, and Alberich lay helpless on the ground. The gods bound him, and hurried him to the hights above. Cloud and mist covered the stage once more, as the orchestra, in an interlude so vivid that it might be called a musical panorama, led us back to the assemblage of the divinities. We passed again through the noise of the smithy, and we heard the heavy tread of climbing feet which had ushered in the giants in the second scene. At last we were shown the table land, still covered as before with a dull haze, and Wotan and Loge appeared with their prisoner. For his ransom Alberich caused the dwarfs to bring all the treasures of Nebelheim, and to these the gods forced him to add the helmet and the ring. Thus stripped of all his power he was sent back to the lower world, but before he departed he laid upon the ring the terrible curse:

"Wie durch Fluch er mir gerieth,
Verflucht sei dieser Ring,"

which. as an orchestral motive is to play so important a part in the music of the whole drama. As the giants approached with Freia, the mists broke away; the light of youth appeared again on the faces of the gods; only the towers of Walhalla in the background remained still vailed in clouds. But Wotan's purpose, while giving the giants the rest of the treasure, was to save the ring for himself, and hence when the payment came to be made be kept it on his finger. Fasolt and Fafner were to have as much gold and silver as, heaped up between their staves, would cover Freia from sight. The whole of Alberich's ransom except the ring was placed upon the pile; even the tarn-helmet was surrendered; still there was a crevice which the ring would just fill. Wotan refused to give it up. The giants in a rage were about to drag Freia away; the scene grew dark again; when from a cleft in the rocks on the right a bluish light appeared, and the figure of Erda, the universal and eternal mother, rose from the earth. She warned Wotan in solemn and mysterious strains of the misfortunes impending over Walhalla, and counseled him to avoid the fatal gold. The god stood for a moment in deep thought, and as he leaned upon his spear we heard the majestic motive which indicates the binding force of Wotan's word. The ring was given up. Joyous strains accompanied the liberation of Freia and the dispersal of the clouds. But Alberich's curse was not long in working its effect. The giants quarreled for the possession of the ring, and Fafner killed Fasolt, put all the treasure into a sack, and took himself off.

Then came a finale, which in picturesque effect and musical beauty surpassed all the great scenes which had gone before it. The gods were at last to take possession of their castle. Donner stood upon the summit of a high rock in the middle of the stage. Swinging his hammer, he collected the mists which

still hung about the background, and a black thunder cloud enveloped him. Out of the darkness we heard his voice and the ominous roll of the heavenly artillery, till with a blow of his sledge he dispersed the clouds in a dazzling flash of lightning, and a rainbow stretched from the rock whereon he stood to the stronghold in the sky. A delicious melody succeeded the stormy passage in the orchestra, and the gods, gathering around the rock, prepared to cross to Walhalla by the rainbow bridge. The monologue of Wotan,

"Abendlich strahlt
Der Sonne Auge,"

before he led the way to the new abode, is one of the most elevated of all Wagner's conceptions, and as it was delivered by Betz, with such richness of illustration and startling harmonic devices in the orchestra, we felt that we had reached the climax of a great poem. The celestial procession ascended and moved slowly on. Suddenly we heard from the depths of the valley below the chorus of the Rhine-daughters bewailing the lost ring, and with this fascinating music resounding in our ears, with the full splendor of the sun revealing for the first time the magnificence of Walhalla, and the refulgent group of the gods advancing toward its shining gates, the curtain fell, and the first evening was at an end.

The performance had lasted two hours and a half without intermission of any kind—for the "Rheingold," unlike the other parts of the work, is not divided into acts—but in spite of the terrible heat of the crowded and unventilated theater, I am sure that no appreciative person can have found the evening long. The interest rose steadily from the first scene to the last; amazement grew that man should have conceived such wonderful effects, or a single brain have found the means to set before the world in all this clearness and splendor such a subtle and deep-felt poem. We came away not only excited, but bewildered. For there is nothing like

this in all music or in all the history of the stage. It was a great surprise to those who have been accustomed to decry Wagner's compositions as abstruse, for they found that it appealed directly to their feelings, and called for no exercise whatever of the reasoning or reflecting powers. The least cultivated spectator could understand and love it. One had only to sit still, look, listen, and enjoy. But nobody can take it all in at one hearing, or at two, or at a dozen. It is a mine that grows richer and richer the more it is explored, and whoever has studied the score for a little while is tempted to drop it in despair of fathoming this wonderful genius. I mention the entire music of Wotan as one of the very greatest dramatic creations in the whole range of the lyric art, and by the music of Wotan I mean not only what is sung, but the equally important and far richer part which is given to the instruments. And for delicacy and sentiment there are few things comparable to the music of Fricka. We shall hear, of course (from those who were not at Bayreuth), the old objection that Wagner's opera contains nothing that can be carried away and whistled as one hurries home to bed, and we shall be asked whether four nights of music without a distinct "tune" can possibly be endurable? I can only point to the enormous success of this experiment as a complete and final answer to the question. In this work, entrancing the senses through a long and uncomfortable evening, the narrower form of rhythmic melody was entirely disregarded. The large, all-pervading melody which took its place reminded us of the beautiful figure in which Wagner once compared his ideal of the opera to the effect produced upon the soul by a beautiful forest in a Summer evening. The wanderer who has just left the town hears in the silence of the wood an endless variety of sweet voices. As they multiply in numbers and increase in mysterious power, they combine to form a great forest of melody which long

haunts his imagination. Yet he cannot hum it to himself; to hear it again he must go back to the woods.

I have not said much of the singers, because in a work of this kind it seems to me the hight of absurdity to expend much criticism upon the vocalism of a first tenor or a prima donna. It may be said however in brief that a more perfect ensemble could probably not be made in Germany. The central figure of course was the Wotan of Herr Betz; the next in merit and importance was the admirable Loge of Herr Vogel (tenor). Gura and Unger, as Donner and Froh, had comparatively little to do, but will be heard more fully hereafter. The Fricka of Frl. Grün was charming, and the three Rhine-daughters were almost perfect. Male singers in Germany as a general thing sing more or less false, and Herr Wagner's company of gods and heroes offer no exception to the nearly universal rule. But we are ready to pardon occasional lapses of this sort in consideration of the remarkable excellence of their personations, their noble appearance, good voices, and close sympathy with the music.

## III.

## SECOND DAY—THE VALKYRIE.

Bayreuth, Aug. 14.—An interval of many years is supposed to take place between the prologue which we saw last night and the action of the drama proper which began with "Die Walküre" this afternoon. Wotan, in the mean time, to create a race of heroes (volsungs), capable by the exercise of human free will of repairing the wrong done in the theft of the gold, had begot Siegmund and his twin sister Sieglinde, of a mortal mother. Sieglinde carried off in infancy by enemies, had been married against her

will to Hunding. Wotan and Siegmund, clad in the skins of wolves, had become the terror of the forests. When the play begins, Siegmund, disarmed and seperated from his father, is flying from his foes. A great deal of music of this division of the trilogy has been heard in New-York, so that the whole seems more or less familiar to us, and motives are constantly recurring which we have learned to understand and love. The orchestral introduction was played by Theodore Thomas last Summer as a sort of prelude to the Love-song. Of course heard in that way it was impossible to grasp its true character, and indeed it must be said of all concert arrangements from this great work that though we are grateful for them, in defect of anything better, they give but the shadow of an idea of what the music really is. This introduction portrays a storm in the forest,—portrays it not only with immense power, but with an originality which, considering the abundance of good storm-music already in existence, is certainly surprising. We heard the voice of the thunder, the angry sweep of the wind, the driving of the rain against the branches, and as the uproar began to die away the curtain rose. The scene was the interior of Hunding's abode, a hut built around the trunk of a huge ash tree which loomed up through the middle of the apartment. A fire burned upon a great stone hearth at one side. There were couches of skins and trophies of the chase, and other tokens of a rude warlike life picturesquely disposed in various parts of the cabin. Siegmund (Niemann) wounded and breathless staggered in at the door, and sank exhausted by the fire. To him from an inner chamber entered Sieglinde (Schefzky). She revived him and gave him drink. Brother and sister did not at that time know each other, and at any rate in the days of the volsungs people are supposed not to have been very particular about the niceties of relationship; nevertheless it was something of a shock to find them within a few minutes

madly in love with each other, and there is no doubt that enjoyment of the music that followed was marred by the impossibility of sympathizing with the characters. Yet what could be more beautiful than this long love duet? It began with a graceful undulating motive, a little fragment of melody in two parts which returned again and again in the course of the drama. It gathered force and passion, and when Siegmund before putting the drinking-horn to his lips caused Sieglinde to touch it with hers, the two part motive changed to a delicious slow melody in the orchestra, which reminded me, not in its idea, but only in its general form, of some the tenderest portions of "Lohengrin." The sweet intercourse of the lovers was interrupted by a strongly marked phrase in the orchestra which indicated (as Wagner tells us) that Hunding had come home and was putting his horse in the stable. Sure enough, Hunding (Niering) straightway appeared, looking very ugly and suspicious. He asked of the stranger the story of his adventures, and Siegmund told it in a comparatively simple and rythmical song written in a style which Wagner uses sparingly, but always with great effect. There is a sample of it in the music of Mime in "Rheingold," and we shall see two fine specimens to-morrow in "Siegfried." With the aid of this style Wagner always succeeds in giving dramatic life to a mere narrative—a task in which the ordinary musician is almost sure to fail. When Siegmund spoke of his father in the course of this story we heard in the orchestra the majestic music with full, soft harmonies, which accompanied the appearance of Wotan and the towers of Walhalla in the second scene of "Rheingold," and so we knew the secret of Siegmund's parentage. Hunding, however, recognized him only as an enemy of his clan, and he vowed revenge. Siegmund should have shelter for the night, but in the morning they must fight. As Siegmund, left alone by the dim light of the fire, lamented his desperate condition, without

shield or sword, and in the house of his foe, Sieglinde returned, having given her husband a sleeping potion. She told her guest of a stranger who had once come to their hut, and driven into the trunk of the ash tree, up to the hilt, a sword which no man was able to pull out again, and as she spoke we heard again the Wotan music just referred to, as well as some of the music accompanying the entrance into Walhalla in the last scene of "Rheingold," and we knew thereby who the stranger was.

The love music now recurred with redoubled beauty, and rose to uncontrollable rapture. Suddenly wide doors at the back of the hut flew open. How shall I describe the surprising scene? Into the dark chamber poured the full glory of a ravishing Spring night. The woods beyond were flooded with the golden rays of the moon. And then began, very softly, Siegmund's famous love song,

> "Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond
> In mildem Lichte leuchtet der Lenz,"

which we thought we knew at home, but found this afternoon a perfectly fresh thing. Without the setting the gem loses nearly all its brilliancy. Without the music and action that have led up to it, without the presence of the woman to whom it is addressed, the superb poetic picture set about it, and the associations which enable us to identify the varying motives in the orchestra with scenes that have gone before, the song is the mere pale and bloodless specter of itself. Besides, it is a duet, not a solo. The monologue of Siegmund was answered in equally tender accents by his companion, and in alternation they carried on the amorous music to a climax not attainable in our imperfect arrangement for a single voice. Siegmund recognized the sword as the weapon which his father had promised him should be at hand in his sorest need. He named it Nothung, the invincible. With a wrench he drew it from the tree. He clasped Sieglinde in his arms, and to the

most passionate and stirring of music the curtain fell upon an act the whole of which was like a prolonged delicate romance.

There was an intermission here of a full hour. The lights were turned up, a large part of the audience left their seats and crowded the restaurants which stand on each side of the theater, or else wandered about the terraced plateau and drank in the much-needed refreshment of pure air. A call blown on the trumpet brought them back to their places. A second blast a few minutes later was the signal to resume the performance. The people quickly settled in their places, and the play went on.

The setting of the first stage picture was one of the most elegant of the whole evening. The scene represented a rocky place, across which stretched a great natural arch; through it led the descent to a long valley seen in distant perspective. Wotan stood in the foreground, with his spear and armor, and near at hand was his daughter and favorite Valkyrie, Brünnhilde (Frau Materna), the principal female character of the drama and doubtless the greatest of all Wagner's creations. She too was armed, wearing coat of mail over her long robes, and carrying shield and hemlet. Wotan commanded her to make ready her horse and in the approaching fight between Siegmund and Hunding to give the victory to Siegmund. She hastened to obey, mounting from rock to rock with the wild and joyful "Hojo-toho!" which we hear so prominently in the Ride of the Valkyries. But Fricka here came to insist that Wotan should punish the lovers for their lawless passion. She appeared at the summit of the rocky arch in the background drawn by two rams in a little chariot. It did not seem to me that the rams added anything to the effect of the scene; indeed, though they were very good for artificial rams, the first impulse of the spectator was to laugh at them. Theatrical machinists and decorators produce some extraordinary illusions, but they have

never yet succeeded in simulating life. The long dialogue in which Wotan and his spouse disputed over Siegmund's fate was another of those great dramatic scenes, full of fine discriminations, of forcible declamation, and of almost illimitable suggestiveness, which alone would point out Wagner as the greatest of writers for the musical stage. The motive which indicates, in its heavy bass, the binding force of law even upon the gods, was given out in the orchestra, and as Wotan sadly yielded his will, we heard Brünnhilde's cry in the distance, and the Valkyrie appeared upon the ridge of the arch. She led her horse by the bridle,—a glossy black creature, with fine head and well-arched neck, clean limbs and shapely shoulders, who trod the boards as if he were on his native soil, and came down the winding path with ease and grace. Here at last was an animal an ornament to the stage. Brünnhilde knew that Wotan's heart was with Siegmund, and she tried long but in vain to make him adhere to his original decree, and allow Hunding to be slain. There was a striking tableau when, kneeling and resting her arms upon Wotan's knee, she looked up into his face while in a low and sad monologue he explained the necessity under which the gods were bound. It was almost a *recitativo parlante*, chiefly with a deep bass accompaniment, until the oft-repeated motive of the beginning of the second scene of "Rheingold" grew out of the instrumental part, and the song then rose to greater animation. Brünnhilde, however, persevered in her intercession till Wotan angrily commanded her to obey.

In the character of this war-maiden whose duty it is, with her eight sisters, to point out the heroes that are to fall in battle, and bring their souls to Walhalla, there is an element of human tenderness shown in the highly emotional music of this scene and developing afterward, in the third and fourth parts of the work, into the sublimity of passion.

Even the most careless listener, however, must have been struck by the great difference between the pure and lofty sentiment of the Valkyrie and the fiery spirit in the music of Siegmund and Sieglinde, who next came up from the valley flying together from Hunding's house. Their duet in this situation was marked by the greatest intensity of feeling, Sieglinde imagining that she heard the horn of her pursuing husband, until at last she fell exhausted in Siegmund's arms, and he laid her senseless on a bank. Brünnhilde then appeared to the hero destined for Walhalla. There was an exquisite dialogue in which she announced his fate, and replied to his questions as to the future state. When she told him that Sieglinde would not be with him there he drew his sword that they might both die together. Brünnhilde, moved by the spectacle of their love, promised to disobey her father and point out Hunding for death instead of Siegmund. Now the clouds began to settle over the rocks, the horn of Hunding was heard in the distance, and Siegmund running to meet him was lost to view in the mists. We heard the voices of the two men, and through occasional rifts in the clouds, by the light of vivid flashes which accompanied the stormy music of the orchestra, we saw them in conflict on the summit of the ridge. Then the form of Brünnhilde appeared in the sky, holding her shield over Siegmund. But suddenly on Hunding's side a red light broke forth and Wotan was seen extending his spear, against which Siegmund's sword was shattered and the hero fell.

Again there was an hour's rest, and we came to the famous third act, with much of which Americans are already somewhat acquainted. The introduction brought us to the well-known Walküren-Ritt, somewhat slower and less energetic than we are accustomed to hear it at home. When the curtain rose one of the sisters was seen looking out upon the clouded sky from the top of a high rock; three

others were grouped around. They watched for the return of the rest of their number from battle-fields, and as often as one was seen in the distance the watchers raised their weired cry, "Hojo-toho." Then across the sky at the back, in a flash of lightning, passed the figure of a mounted Valkyrie, with the corpse of a warrior thrown across the saddle. The illusion, produced by a sort of magic lantern, was very well managed. Each Valkyrie as she arrived was supposed to leave her horse in a wood to the right, and came upon the stage in propria persona, to join the strange chorus. The last to come was Brünnhilde; she came not from battle, but fled from the wrath of her father, and she brought not the body of a hero, but the living Sieglinde, for whom she begged the protection of her sisters. The concerted passage in which the Valkyries interceded for Brünnhilde was a remarkable example of Wagner's ability in a kind of composition which he seldom employs, because his dramas seldom afford occasion for it. The interview between Wotan and Brünnhilde was so full of beauty that I hardly know how to describe it. The anger of the god was mingled with the sorrowful tenderness of the father, and the music of Brünnhilde was one long succession of the most superb and moving strains. In no previous part of the work had passion risen to such intensity and emotion found such sympathetic expression. The last scene, known in our concert-rooms as "Wotan's Abschied," took place in the twilight. Wotan could not pardon his daughter's disobedience. She was condemned to lie in a deep trance, and to fall into the power of the first mortal who should find and wake her. But her pitiful entreaties touched the father's heart. He consented that a supernatural fire, a barrier which only the stoutest of heroes could pass, should burn around the rock of her imprisonment. The god pressed his daughter in a long embrace, and laid her to sleep under a spreading ash. He covered her face with

her helm. He laid her long shield upon her breast. Then we heard the fire music—slower, I thought, than we have it at home—and all along the ridge of rocks across the middle of the stage the flames sprang up. The steam effect was used here with entire success, and as the red vapor curled upward to the roof it was difficult not to believe that the scene was really in flames. Now at least, if never before, did we realize how great a creation this wonderful finale is, and as the curtain fell there was a general outbreak of enthusiasm, with shouts and clapping of hands. The performance began at 20 minutes after 4 and ended at 10.

There were none of the disarrangements of the mechanism such as were noticed the first night. On the other hand there was a perceptible disarrangement in some of the voices. Wotan was evidently very much fatigued, and Fricka was not as good as before. Niemann I cannot like. His voice is worn and husky, and his love-making is brutal. Like the others he suffers no doubt from the unparalleled labor of getting ready for this extraordinary performance. The singing of nearly all the artists was better at the dress rehearsals than it is now, and it was better yesterday than it is to-night. The Brünnhilde however was quite equal to the work thrust upon her. Frau Materna, the favorite of the Vienna opera house, is a tall and stoutly-built woman, not too corpulent for her hight, yet with an ungraceful fullness about the back and shoulders. She has a noble and pleasing face, prominent and regular features, black hair, expressive eyes, and a shapely hand and arm. Her voice is large, clear, and abundant; her intonation is pure; in point of culture she ranks with the very best artists of Germany, while in dramatic power, intelligence, and conscientiousness she has few superiors. She is indeed an exceptional artist. Most of the German singers—even the best—will not be at the trouble of saving their voices. However, the faults and merits

of individual actors and actresses are of no moment in comparison with the greater questions involved in these representations.

The audience to-day was the same as the day before. The Emperor of Germany was again present, with the grand dukes and other notables. The crowd was dense, the heat was terrific, and many of the spectators were suffering the tortures of hunger, for the restaurants have broken down under the strain, and Bayreuth is on the point of starvation, Still the people listened with absorbed interest, and occasionally interrupted the music with well-meant but very unacceptable applause. Herr Wagner has caused a placard to be posted in the house requesting the audience to abstain from such demonstrations, and on no account to call anybody out, as neither he nor the artists wish to be thrown out of the artistic frame of mind. Consequently none of them will respond to a call. Yesterday Wagner left the theater before the end of the performance, sick with vexation, fatigue, and anxiety. To-day he is at his post and apparently well and happy.

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## IV.

## THIRD DAY—SIEGFRIED.

Bayreuth, Aug. 16.—The third performance of the Nibelung series was to have taken place yesterday, but Herr Betz was so hoarse that a postponement was unavoidable. Most of the male artists in fact, and several of the ladies, are suffering from the tremendous strain of the long Summer's rehearsals, aggravated I dare say by the want of proper food and the discomforts of the heat and the crowd, and it is not unlikely that other postponements may become necessary before we reach the end of the festival. To-day Betz is himself again, and the per-

formance of "Siegfried" was the most successful so far of the series. The work is very different from the two preceding. It is less romantic than "Das Rheingold," less heroic than "Die Walküre," more ethereally poetical than either.

Siegfried is the hero born of the union of Seigmund and Sieglinde, and destined to be the agent in repairing the wrong done in the theft of the Ring and at the same time of bringing the reign of the divinities of Walhalla to an end. Sieglinde died in giving birth to him, and the child was brought up by the dwarf Mime, who hoped to use him in recovering the Ring and the Tarn helmet. The instrumental introduction made use of the anvil motive, and when the curtain drew back we saw the dim interior of a great cavern in a wood. On the left was a smithy, with a glowing fire and an anvil, where Mime sat hammering at a sword blade. On the right a few steps led up to the opening of this rocky retreat, and beyond we saw a beautiful vista of forest, with golden light bathing the foliage. It was not a scene to astonish and bewilder the spectator, like that of the depths of the Rhine, but it was a picture whose tone and composition delighted the artistic taste and pleased us better and better the more we looked at it. There was less of decoration and mechanism employed in "Siegfried," and fewer characters appeared upon the stage than in any of the other divisions of the work, and yet the effects, musical and dramatic alike, far surpassed those of the previous evenings. Mime was a personage of inferior importance in "Rheingold;" here he became one of the chief actors in the story, and the remarkable ability of which the representative of the part gave proof on Sunday evening was now illustrated with much greater fullness. Herr Schlosser of Munich, to whom this role was allotted, is highly esteemed as a delineator of "character parts," and in Mime he seemed to find a congenial opportunity. The dwarf was malevo-

lent and hypocritical. In the opening scene he sat scowling and complaining over his work. He could not make a weapon strong enough for the volsung. Brands that the giants might have wielded Siegfried shattered with a single blow. Only the sword of Siegmund, broken against Wotan's spear, would fit his hand, but all the art of the dwarf could not mend that terrible blade. Mime was still hammering and lamenting, in a song of great vigor and a certain rhythmic regularity, when the merry notes of a horn were heard in the wood, and Siegfried came bounding in, driving a bear by a rope. Georg Unger, who personated the hero, is a tall, handsome, well-built fellow, with a robust, half-trained tenor voice of good quality, and a free and dashing manner. Dressed in a short coat of skins, with bare arms, flowing yellow hair, short beard, and a silver horn slung at his belt, he was at any rate in appearance an ideal hero of the Northern race. He amused himself a while with Mime's fear of the bear; he tried the sword just made for him, and broke it at the first trial; he threw himself in anger on a couch of skins; he repulsed the dwarf's advances, and dashed from his hand the proffered food and drink. When Siegfried came into the cavern, it was as if a high wind fresh from the fir-clad mountains swept through those dark recesses. There was a wonderful scene when the dwarf drew close and began to tell what he had done for him, how he had found him as a helpless child, and fed and clothed him—

Als zullendes Kind
Zog ich dich auf,
Warmte mit Kleiden
Den kleinen Wurm,—

and how he got no thanks for his pains. And Siegfried frankly replied that he did not love the dwarf, and could not love him. In this scene an exquisite melody of which great use is made afterward is viven to the violoncello. The psychological distinction between the two characters was preserved in

the music and strongly marked by the actors also. Siegfried, impatient of Mime's hypocrisy, at last insisted upon knowing the secret of his birth. He extorted from the dwarf the story of his mother's death and of the broken sword, the narrative being interrupted by the constant attempt of Mime to recur to the catalogue of his benefactions, "Als zullendes Kind zog ich dich auf," which Siegfried checked with angry impetuosity. "That," he cried, "shall be my sword. Weld the pieces for me this very day, and I will go forth into the world, free as the fish in the stream and the bird in the air." So, with a melody of characteristic strength and freshness,

"Wie der Fisch froh
In der Fluth schwimmt,
Wie der Fink frei
Sich davon schwingt"—

he dashed into the sunlight and disappeared.

The whole had been vivid, dramatic, and elevated even above the common level of this work. Now we were to have another equally impressive, but in a very different style. Close upon the departure of Siegfried entered Wotan, in the disguise of the Wanderer, a character which he preserves throughout this division of the play. A broad hat half concealed his features. A dark blue mantle hid his figure. A reddish beard fell over his breast. His spear with the potent runes served for a staff. A glow of light, so artfully thrown that it seemed to radiate from his face, indicated to the spectator the presence of a supernatural being. He asked for hospitality and was rudely repulsed, but seating himself by the cavern fire he staked his head upon his ability to answer any three questions the dwarf might choose to put him. Nothing could have been more dramatic than the ensuing dialogue. The majestic utterances of the god were clothed in music of the most elevated and imposing character. The craft of the dwarf found expression in strangely

contrasted strains, while the figure of the actor, as he crouched ungainly by his anvil, questioning, musing, losing himself in perplexity over his strange visitor, was a bit of realistic personation which I shall not soon forget. All this time of course the orchestra continued its great work of illustration and suggestion. "What race lives in the bowels of the earth?"—here we heard the same motive which accompanied our introduction to the caves of Nibelheim in "The Rhinegold." "What race works on the earth's back?—here came again the tramp of the giants as it fell upon our ears when they went to fetch away Freia. "Who dwells in the cloudy hights?"—the oft-repeated motive, which symbolizes the power and glory of the gods, came to us with the answer. Mime in his turn was able to reply when the Wanderer asked him about the volsungs and the virtues of the broken sword Nothung; but who might mend that sword he could not tell. "Only he who has never known fear shall weld Nothung anew," exclaimed the god, and so saying he went forth again into the forest, and as he went a mighty music, as of rushing winds and the tossing boughs of great forests, rose out of the orchestra, and lightning flashed in the sky. Mime, remembering that Siegfried knew not fear, sank trembling to the ground. There was a short, impressive scene in which Mime portrayed his terror, while the bass tuba, to which Wagner has given such great power of expression, uttered underneath the orchestral accompaniment a suggestive passage of its own. The dwarf cowered behind his anvil. Suddenly the music changed; we heard in the forest the voice of Siegfried; the breezy song which followed him when he rushed forth in the earlier part of the act recurred again, and he burst into the cave, calling loudly for the sword. Mime, still agitated and bewildered, repeated only the words of Wotan:

"Nur wer das Fürchten nie erfuhr
Schmiedet Nothung neu."

Roused at last, he tried to teach Siegfried fear. He told him of Fafner, who in the form of a dragon kept guard over the treasure of the Nibelungs, in a lonely region called Neidhole. But Siegfried's spirits only rose the higher at the tale. He longed to attack the dragon. He demanded to be led to the spot. He called for the pieces of his father's sword, and welded them himself by the dwarf's forge. As he stood with his hand on the bellows-rope, and the flames glowed about the iron, he sang the great Song of the Smithy:

> "Nothung, Nothung
> Neidliches Schwert!
> Was musstest du zerspringen?"

—a song to be given with full chest and head erect and a bold and manly voice, a song that breathes of heroism in every note, and rouses the coldest listener to a passonate delight. It is difficult to write of this long scene in Mime's cavern without an appearance of exaggerated enthusiasm, but the strongest possible praise would not be too strong for such an extraordinary creation of genius, and I am sure that there was hardly an intelligent man in the theater who did not feel his pulses beating quicker and quicker as the act developed itself. The blade was drawn red from the fire, hammered and tempered and fitted to the hilt (let me remark here that the forge and fire were real, and they were real sparks which flew from the iron when it was beaten on the anvil. Siegfried's exultation rose as he drew near the end of his task; with every repetition of the song, "Nothung, Nothung, ho-ho! ha-hei! ho-ho! ha-hei!" the excitement increased, till the sword was finished, and he tested it by striking a terrible blow upon the anvil, cleaving the iron block in twain. Then the curtain fell.

In the second act, after a portentous Vorspiel, we saw the exterior of Fafner's cave, a huge pile of rocks filling the background, a forest opening on the left, beautiful spreading trees and clumps of reeds

extending toward the front. It was dark night, and we dimly discerned the figure of a man leaning against the rocks. It was Alberich, who haunted the spot where his stolen treasures lay h'd. There was a fine scene between him and the Wanderer, Wotan, over which, as it was somewhat episodical in a dramatic sense, I may pass briefly, only remarking that according to his custom Wagner gives the god here a sort of solemn declamation, while the melody, which is of the most exquisite kind, is assigned almost entirely to the orchestra. The noise of a storm-wind and a sudden gleam of light followed Wotan as he disappeared from the stage. Then day began to dawn. The faint twilight was followed by the rosy blush, and in the growing light the beauty of the foliage revealed itself. Mime led Siegfried upon the scene and showed him the cave of the dragon which he was to kill. For the dwarf, since he had not been able to prevent the young volsung from getting possession of the terrible sword which was to conquer the dragon, had resolved first to aid him in his enterprise and then to kill him and secure the treasures. Here again, as in the first act, the characters and purposes of the dwarf and the hero were wonderfully discriminated in the music. When Mime had gone away Siegfried threw himself upon a grassy bank at the foot of a tree. And now began a pastoral scene of delicious delicacy and elegance. The orchestral part of what followed has been called almost symphonic in its character, as it certainly is in its beauty and richness. As Siegfried in a charming strain of tenderness, such as he had not hitherto shown, mused on the history of his birth, and gave voice to the half-defined aspirations which drove him into the world, the orchestra filled the scene with the music of nature. The still woods woke to life with the rising of the sun. The murmur of rustling leaves, the sighing of the waving branches, the whir of myriads of insects, the morning greeting of

the birds, rose and fell upon the air. It was the birds at last that drew Siegfried from his revery. "Ah," he cried, "how often have I tried to understand their song! Let me imitate it, and perhaps I shall know what it says." He made a pipe from a reed which he cut with his sword. The futile attempt to reproduce the music of the feathered tribes on this rude instrument is treated by Wagner with considerable humor. Siegfried threw away his whistle, and seating himself at the foot of a tree took up his silver horn. "This at least," said he, "I can play." He wound upon it an exceedingly pretty and merry tune, the effect of the scene being greatly helped by the fact that the horn passage was played not in the orchestra, as is usual in such cases, but by a performer concealed behind the tree.

The horn aroused the giant Fafner, and we saw him in dragon's guise (the German text calls him a "great worm") roll out of the cave. The machine was big enough for a man to stand upright inside its head, and the voice of the Fafner of the first evening issued from its chasm of a throat. The battle that ensued was short and, to tell the plain truth, rather absurd. In drawing his sword from the body of the slain dragon some of the blood fell upon Siegfried's hand; it burned like fire, and he put his hand to his mouth. Instantly the understanding of the language of birds came to him. From the branches overhead we heard a light soprano voice, in phrases which most ingeniously wedded articulate speech to bird-like tones, direct Siegfried to enter the cavern and secure the helmet and the ring. We heard it again warn him against the treachery of Alberich, and behold the dwarf, when he approached, was made to utter not the false professions that were framed on his lips but the malice and murderous purpose that lurked in his heart. He offered a poisoned drink, and Siegfried slew him, threw his body into the cave, and blocked up the entrance with the car-

cass of the dragon. It would be useless to try to describe the music of this animated scene, or rather I should say this succession of scenes all crowded with incident. Every action had its appropriate accompaniment, every word fitted exactly its musical expression. There is no such thing as analyzing music which changes as rapidly and freely as the shapes in the evening sky. At one moment the orchestra told us of quarrel and conflict. The next, it brought back the music of the woods, as Siegfried stretched himself beneath the trees and in gentle accents, lamenting his desolate condition, asked counsel of his friends the birds. Again the pretty voice came from the tree-tops. It told him of Brünnhilde, and bade him penetrate the barrier of fire, and win the most glorious of women for his bride. Siegfried started to his feet. A new passion burned in his veins, and with the first experience of love his music took a changed character. He was no longer the rosy and bare-limbed young savage, rejoicing in his freedom and strength; higher aims and deeper feelings than he had yet known made him another man. At his call a bird fluttered down from the trees to show him his way, and led by this strange guide he set forth for the rock of fire.

The third act was introduced by an orchestral passage of a somber and mysterious character, with sustained harmonies of marked importance for the trumpets and trombones. Again the curtain rose upon night and a wild landscape. Steep rocks stretched across the background and over them lowered an angry sky. Thunder rolled and lightning flashed from the clouds. Hither came Wotan, the Wanderer, to call up Erda for counsel and prophecy. At his summons a faint bluish light began slowly to appear in a hollow of the rocks, and we saw dimly the figure of a woman clothed in black robes and a silvery vail rise half into view. Little by little, while the solemn music went on, the form became more distinct and radiated a stronger light.

But Erda would give no advice in the coming crisis of the divinities of Walhalla. She had parted with her wisdom to Brünnhilde, and when Wotan told how he had imprisoned the Walküre in sleep and fire, Erda vailed her head in dismay and was silent. The god foresaw the downfall of his race through the triumph of human free will in the person of Siegfried, but in accents of inimitable dignity and sadness he avowed that he did not regret it, and after a scene of great power, pervaded by a dignified pathos, he commanded Erda to sink again to her everlasting sleep; the light faded away, and the Wanderer was left alone. The storm had now ceased, and dawn began to show in the sky. With the morning light came Siegfried following his bird, which fluttered a moment upon the scene and then disappeared among the rocks. Here then was the path to Brünnhilde's prison; but when Siegfried attempted to pursue the way, Wotan withstood him, and barred the approach with his spear. A blow with the sword Nothung cut the spear in two. The power of the gods was forever broken. While the ponderous motive in the bass, so often cited, was thundered forth—this time, however, with halting and disturbed rhythm, to indicate that the law was at last fulfilled—lightning flashed, flames began to gleam among the rocks, and Wotan disappeared. Siegfried hailed the outbreak of the flames with cries of joy, and as they gradually overspread the rocks his exultation rose. He plunged into the midst of them. We saw him for a few moments pushing forward, and then the clouds of red steam rising from below and the ruddy vapors dropping from above enveloped the whole scene. In a moment a curtain of gauze had fallen across the stage, and behind it the whole theater seemed to be wrapped in flame and curling smoke. The orchestra meanwhile continued an interlude in which there was a marvelous combination of the two characteristic melodies of Siegfried with one

of the motives of Wotan's Farewell in the last scene of "Die Walküre."

When the flames died down we looked upon the other side of the barrier of fire—the summit of Brünnhilde's rock, as in the third act of "Die Walküre." Brünnhilde lay as Wotan left her, the helm over her face, the long shield covering her body. In the background the glow of advancing day struggled with the fading light of the flames, when Siegfried mounted the rocks and came upon the scene. He raised the shield and helmet, he cut the fastenings of the armor, and Brünnhilde, waking from her sleep, recognized in the young volsung her appointed deliverer. The whole of this last scene was virtually a love duet of the most impassioned character, its spirit changing as Brünnhilde, no more a goddess but now in heart and impulse a woman, was swayed in turn by fear, by trust, by modest tenderness and burning love, and Siegfried gave loose rein to feelings which seemed to engross his whole nature. Love duets alike of the tender and the fiery sort are common enough in operatic music, but no one has ever written a scene like this, which startles the listener with the dramatic truth of every phrase and evidences of such deep insight into the human heart. It has all the characteristic eloquence and clearness of Wagner's peculiar form of melodic declamation and a great deal of what the least cultivated ear recognizes as suave and well-defined melody. The composer resorts in it to a common device of the older schools which he seldom allows himself, employing the two voices in concert instead of alternately, and the rapturous finale reminds one somewhat of the Italian *stretta*. Here Frau Materna, the only woman living, I am sure, who could sing Brünnhilde, was superb. Unger was not a bad Siegfried. Wagner chose him mainly for his fine figure and bearing, and when he began to study his part he was a musician of very ordinary abilities. He has still a great deal to learn; above

all he has to learn how to avoid shouting and to keep his voice clear and true through a long and difficult performance. But minor defects of interpretation were lost sight of in the effect of a scene which roused the whole audience to extraordinary excitement, and brought the evening to a glorious close.

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## V.

## FOURTH DAY—THE DUSK OF THE GODS.

BAYREUTH, Aug. 17.—There is a constant upward progress in the four divisions of Wagner's enormous opera. "Siegfried" is greater than "Die Walküre," just as "Die Walküre" surpasses "Rheingold," and to-night we reach an overpowering climax in the "Götterdämmerung" (Dusk of the Gods), for whose splendors even the three previous performances hardly prepared us. Music, decoration, and dramatic interest here rise to what the bewildered spectator believes must be their last expression; and moreover in this as in the other divisions the climax is reached gradually, the last act in every case being the most impressive, and the anticipations of the audience kept constantly alert until the final dropping of the curtain. "The Dusk of the Gods" has for its special subject the atonement by Siegfried and the extinction of the glories of Walhalla. It begins with a mournful prophecy of the approaching end. When the stage was disclosed, after a very brief prelude, the three Nornes, or Fates (one of whom was personated by the celebrated Johanna Wagner), were descried by the dim light on Brünnhilde's rock. They threw to one another the golden rope of fate, and in its strands read with dismay of misfortunes to the gods. The music here, the most

significant part of which was given—according to Wagner's frequent usage—to the orchestra and not to the voices, was full of mysterious and solemn portent. At last the rope parted, and crying out that the end had come, the Nornes, locked in each other's arms, sank into the earth. Day broke slowly, and with the increasing light the orchestra gave us the first hint of a new and most charming melody, upon which, combined with a motive often heard last evening, Wagner has built up a magnificent and moving scene between Siegfried and Brünnhilde. The hero, in full armor, was now to go forth in quest of honor and adventure, and the Valkyrie, giving him her horse, took leave of him in a duet which combined, as no other music does in the world, the lofty heroic spirit inspiring the whole tragedy with the ardent woman's love which constitutes one of its main springs of action. Here again Materna, who bears upon her strong shoulders so much of the burden of the last three nights, moved and electrified the whole house. Husband and wife exchanged vows of eternal fidelity, and Siegfried having placed upon Brünnhilde's finger the Ring of the Nibelungs as a wedding token, disappeared in the valley, the notes of his silver horn coming up from below while the Valkyrie watched his retreating form.

Thus far we had only a prologue to the drama. The curtain remained drawn during a long instrumental interlude, but there was no intermission. The interlude was one of the most beautiful and ingenious things in the whole work. It was founded upon the notes of the horn, which changed almost imperceptibly into a sort of scherzo. Other motives identified with the hero were afterward introduced, and the whole were combined in a magnificent specimen of imposing and intricate composition worthy of this unapproachable master of the orchestra. When the curtain rose again for the first act the stage was set to represent a court in the dwelling of Gunther, a chief

of the race of the Gibichungs on the Rhine. The room into which we looked opened right and left into inner apartments. At the rear it was not inclosed, but from its outer edge a pleasant slope led down to the shore. The river, coming from the far background, flowed by on the left. Trees and rocks filled up the scene on the right. The mountains beyond the river appeared on the distant horizon. The architecture of the hall was rude and heavy, but rich according to the fashions of a primitive age. There was a peculiarity in the lighting which had a marvelous effect. Little or no light was thrown from the interior of the hall; even the auditorium had none to reflect; but the open country at the back was glowing in the sun, and the illumination came from there as it would have done in nature. This was contrary to all theatrical usage, but the result was admirable. At a raised table on one side sat Gunther (Eugen Gura) and his sister Gutrune (Weckerlin), with drinking horns before them. On the lower level was Gunther's half-brother Hagen (Siehr), natural son of Alberich, and the evil principle of this division of the drama. Hagen sang the praises of Siegfried, whom he declared to be the fittest hero to wed Gutrune, and of Brünnhilde whom he wished Gunther to take to wife, Hagen's plot being to get possession of the ring. In the midst of this conversation Siegfried's horn was heard in the distance, and presently he arrived in a boat. Received with cordial hospitality, he gave in a richly varied scene an account of his adventures, and swore an oath of brotherhood with Gunther, drinking with him from a horn in which each had mingled with the drink a few drops of his own blood. Old and new motives were welded together in the instrumentation of this interesting scene. The story of Alberich's treasures brought back reminiscences of the Nibelheim music, and the oath was accompanied by an expressive phrase which was merely the oft-repeated "law

motive" somewhat curtailed. Gutrune meanwhile had watched the hero with uncontrollable admiration, and readily yielded to Hagen's advice to mix him a love potion. Siegfried took the drink. Instantly all recollection of his intercourse with Brünnhilde was magically effaced. He conceived a violent passion for Gutrune. He asked to have her for wife, and promised in return to aid Gunther in obtaining Brünnhilde. Impatient of a moment's delay, he seized his arms, he hurried Gunther at once to the boat, and pushed out into the river. There was a fine distinction between the exciting music in which all this was conveyed, and the love music of the prologue and the previous evening in which the volsung had sung his passion for Brünnhilde. That was the rapturous expression of a pure and noble feeling; this was the fury of an insane and reckless infatuation.

But the orchestral interlude which followed the departure of Siegfried and Gunther (the curtain meanwhile being dropped for a few minutes) brought us back to the love melody of the prologue, and so prepared us for the next scene, on Brünnhilde's rock, where the Valkyrie sat contemplating Siegfried's ring. The recurrence of the motive of the Walküren-Ritt prepared us for the appearance of Brünnhilde's sister "spear-maiden" Waltraute (Frl. Jaïde), who came to beg that Siegfried's ring might be returned to the Daughters of the Rhine, and the fate of the gods thus averted. With correct poetical perception, however, Wagner made Brünnhilde repel this proposal with indignation. She had no more part with the gods, but a mortal hero was all in all to her. How grandly Materna delivered the magnificent music in which the answer is conveyed! It is a passage in which tenderness and passion are artfully united, and true womanly feeling, with which the opera had not greatly concerned itself until this superb creature came upon the scene, finds free and

sympathetic expression. With the departure of Waltraute, accompanied by cloud and storm as she sped through the air, evening came on and the light of the protecting flames began to show itself with the accompaniment of the fire motive. The sound of a horn in the distance brought Brünnhilde to her feet with a cry of ecstacy. But it was not the form of her Siegfried that presently broke through the fiery barrier and stood upon the summit of the ridge. Still under the influence of the magic draught, the hero had assumed the appearance of Gunther by the power of the tarn hemlet. As Gunther he now claimed Brünnhilde for his bride, and after a violent scene wrenched the ring from her finger and forced her away to the spot where the real Gunther awaited her.

In the second act we returned to the hall of Gunther, but this time we saw the exterior. It was dark night when the curtain rose, and Hagen, with spear and shield, sat leaning asleep against one of the columns of the porch. As the moon suddenly threw a little light upon the scene we became aware of a figure crouching at Hagen's knee and whispering to him as he slept. It was Alberich, who came to urge him on to the murder of Siegfried and the siezure of the ring and helmet. There was something awful in music, scene, and action alike, as Alberich whispered his wicked suggestions into the ear of his son, and Hagen with fixed gaze and motionless figure answered in a dull and half articulate way, as one who dreams of crime and welcomes temptation in his sleep. In many respects the passage seemed to me one of the most marvelous in the whole work for originality and strength, and when the figure of Alberich gradually melted away and his voice came to us out of the impenetrable darkness into which he disappeared—"Sei treu, Hagen, mein Sohn! Sei treu! Sei treu!"—the effect was little less than awful.

Morning then dawned, to a little orchestral passage of great beauty, and hardly was the sun up

before Siegfried, who had left Brünnhilde with Gunther and transported himself back to the Gibichung's hall by the power of the helmet, appeared in his proper form and called earnestly for Gutrune. Hagen, by a blast upon his horn and a loud call, summoned the men of Gibichung to assemble. Horns answered him from various quarters, and the men came hurrying upon the scene, not trooping forward in a body and planting themselves in a stiff row down the side of the stage, after the absurd custom of the conventional opera, but clambering over the rocks from all directions, one or two at a time, and taking natural and picturesque positions here and there, each man having something to say as he came forward, asking the meaning of the call, until the whole combined in a splendid four and six part chorus—the first instance of the employment of a chorus in the entire four nights, if we except the music for the Valkyries. Hagen bade them prepare sacrifices and make ready for a wedding, and even as he spoke Gunther and the captive bride, Brünnhilde, arrived in the boat, and were hailed with joyful acclamations. The whole of this chorus, or more properly concerted music, is in Wagner's grandest manner. When Siegfried came forth from the house leading Gutrune by the hand, and followed by the women of the chorus, Brünnhilde was overpowered with horror and amazement, but Siegfried did not know her. Recognizing the ring, however, on his finger, she guessed the trick that had been played upon her, and wildly denounced Siegfried as a traitor. She declared that she was already wedded to him and would have none other for her husband, and Gunther, who did not know of Siegfried's relations with Brünnhilde, was filled with suspicion and resentment, of which Hagen took advantage to plot with him for Siegfried's death. I must not dwell too long upon the incidents of this crowded and exciting scene. Siegfried swore upon the point of a spear that he had been true to his

oath of brotherhood. Brünnhilde rushed forward and swore to the truth of her accusation. The rage of the injured woman, the amorous infatuation of Siegfried, the timid and halting treachery of Gunther, the malignity of Hagen, the perplexity of the multitude, were all portrayed with amazing vividness in music which, though not strictly an ensemble, contained concerted passages of the most brilliant character. Dramatically it is one of the noblest Wagner has ever written, Brünnhilde being the central figure about which all the other personages group themselves and to whose glorious passion all the other sentiments of the composition seem to be tributary.

When the people had dispersed, Hagen induced Gunther to aid him in compassing Siegfried's death, and by working upon the jealousy and just resentment of Brünnhilde he learned from her that the volsung was vulnerable only in the back. It seemed as if we were to go on from one grand scene to another still grander, and the excitement became almost painful when the great chorus was followed by the still greater trio in which the emotions of these three characters found such forcible expression. It was a trio which alone would have made the success of any ordinary opera; it was in the truest sense melodious; and yet the "tune" in the voice parts was by no means distinctly marked. Here we had an excellent example of the correctness of Wagner's theory. An Italian composer would have suspended the action of the drama while soprano, baritone, and bass unwound in turn the measures of a cantilena; Wagner allows them to give free expression to the language of passion, while the orchestra, doing what voices alone were compelled to do in the old school, supplies what is necessary to shape the whole into an eloquent and complete melody. The scene was interrupted by the appearance of a troupe of children, dancing and strewing branches and flowers, and then came the wedding procession,

Gutrune in the midst, borne aloft upon a shield, and Siegfried walking by her side. Gunther took Brünnhilde by the hand and forced her to join the cortege. Then the curtain fell.

In the third act, Siegfried, separated from his companions in a hunting party, came to a beautiful spot on the Rhine, where the path led down among trees and bushes from a high bank to the brink of the river. There the Rhine Daughters, exquisite creations of this most poetical of musicians, rose to the surface with their beautiful song. They besought Siegfried to restore the ring, but he refused. When his companions overtook him, they proceeded to make good cheer; and Siegfried, seated in the middle, told the story of his adventures. The music became more and more wonderful as we approached the catastrophe. Accompanying Siegfried's narrative, the orchestra reviewed, so to speak, all the prominent points of his career. We had the song of the smithy and the piping of the birds. Just then two ravens flew across the stage. "Those are the harbingers," cried Hagen, "of your coming to Wotan;" and as Siegfried turned to look at them Hagen's spear pierced his back. In the hour of death the hero recovered his reason, and in an exquisite song, with a highly original accompaniment, in which harps in harmony and the violins play a prominent part, he called upon Brünnhilde, and so expired. They raised him on his shield, and in sorrowful procession returned to the hall of Gunther. It is here that occurred the gem of this division of the opera, the funeral march which so accomplished but unfriendly a critic as Hanslick of Vienna has pronounced the greatest since Beethoven's Heroic Symphony. The praise is not too strong. Whether for the novelty of the theme, the sympathetic character of the movement, or the splendors of the orchestral combinations, the march is unrivaled, and the listener is not only interested but surprised to find it introducing familiar motives

after a while so naturally that they seem to belong to this very place. When the bearers took up their burden light clouds began to drift across the scene, gradually concealing them as they toiled up the steep bank. Before the last of the men had gone off the stage the whole was hidden. And so, with armed forms dimly descried through the gathering mists bearing the hero on his last journey, night falling, and the rays of the moon touching the tops of the spears and helmets, with the wondrous music, so full of memories and suggestions rising out of the unseen abyss, the scene passed away and left us haunted by its awful beauty.

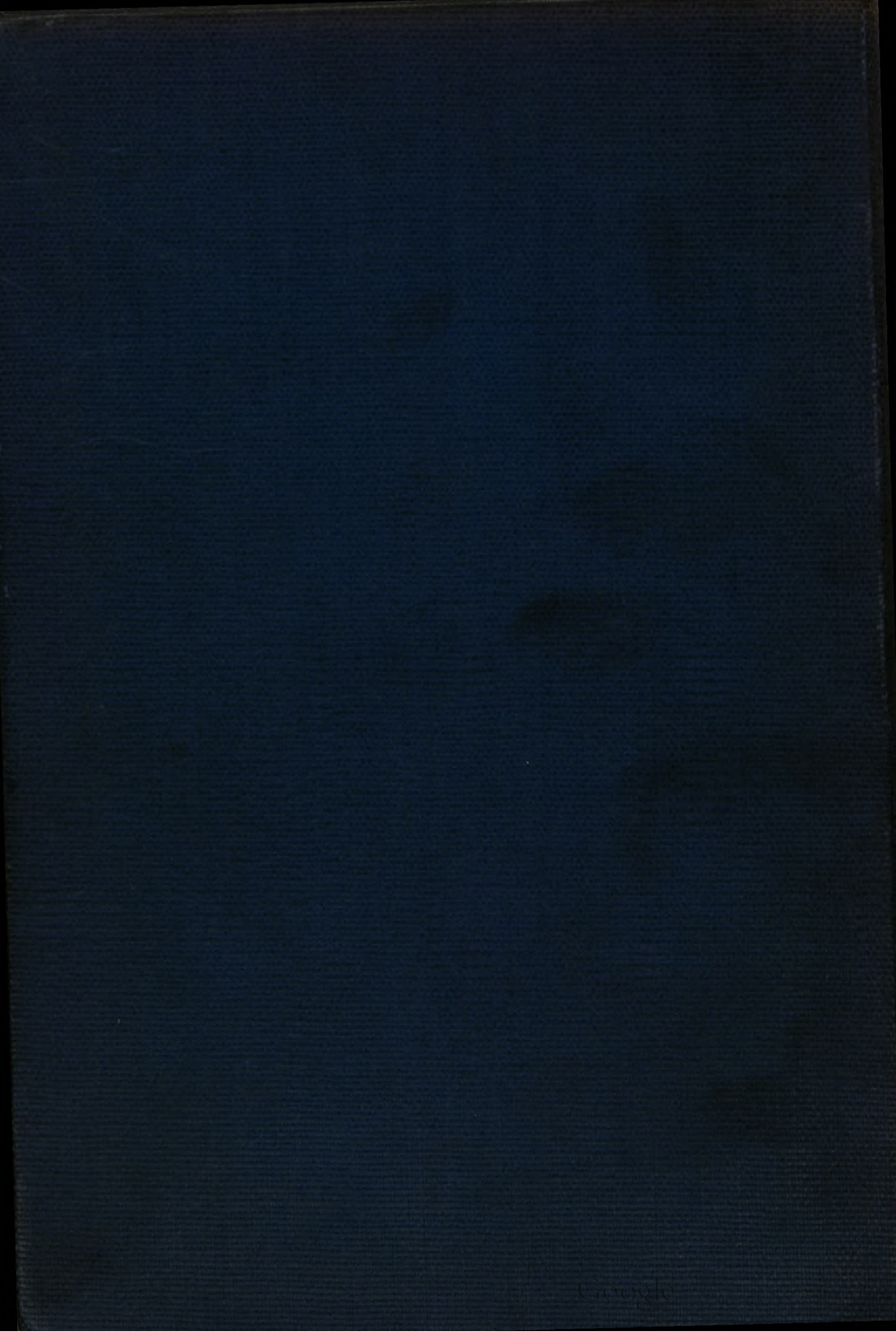
When they brought Siegfried's body to the hall of the Gibichungs the curse of Alberich was not long in working again its evil effects. Gunther and Hagen quarreled for the possession of the ring, and Hagen slew Gunther; but when he tried to take the ring from Siegfried's finger, the dead man raised his arm, and Hagen fell back in dismay. Then Brünnhilde entered. All stood back to let her approach. She comprehended now the mystery of Siegfried's conduct. In a long monologue of delicious tenderness she declared herself Siegfried's only love, his companion in life and death, and she bade the men prepare the funeral pile. It would be impossible to convey by a mere descriptive letter any idea of the beauty and grandeur of this final scene, the crown of a work whose greatness is beyond praise. They built the pile by the bank of the river, and when it was finished they placed the body on it (having first deftly exchanged the real Siegfried for an effigy), and covered it with wreaths of laurel; but first Brünnhilde took the accursed ring from his finger, resolved to destroy both it and herself together. She seized a torch and threw it upon the pile. The flames shot up with their clouds of lurid smoke. Her horse was led forward; she grasped it by the bridle, and dashing forward to leap into the flames disappeared in the crowd. Suddenly the blazing

pile fell together; fire seemed to spring up in all parts of the hall; the roof and columns of the portico came crashing to the ground; the waters of the Rhine rose and engulfed the spot where stood the funeral pile; and the Rhine danghters recovered their treasure by the sacrifice of Brünnhilde. A red glare next overspread the horizon, and when the clouds lifted we saw in the distant sky Walhalla in flames, and the gods in dismay grouped around the central figure of Wotan. So ends the colossal work. The "Götterdämmerung" began at 4 and ended at 10:15, with the usual two hours of intermission. At the close the whole audience rose in a transport of enthusiasm, and shouted for Wagner until he came before the curtain and in a few words, spoken in a clear and pleasant voice, expressed his satisfaction with the efforts of the artists and the readiness of the people to sustain the highest efforts of art. He was called forward again, with shouts and cheers and the waving of hats, and then there were loud cries for the conductor, Hans Richter, who, however, did not respond.

You will have no difficulty in gathering from what I have written that the success of Wagner's experiment is not only complete, it is triumphant and unquestioned. Certainly I have nothing to retract of the confident language which I used after the first day; on the contrary, the effect of the work has been steadily more and more marked, and minor defects in the representation have been smoothed away. Some unnecessary criticism has been expended upon the singers and too much attention paid to little hitches (during the "Rheingold" only) in the machinery, and vagaries of the clouds. But we did not come thirty-five hundred miles to criticise a tenor or a steam pipe; we came to witness a great attempt in art, whose merit is quite independent of the persons chosen to set it forth. It may truly be said, however, that all the principal singers are good and well imbued with the spirit of their parts, so that Wagner

has had an adequate albeit not a perfect interpretation. But Wagner's style of musical declamation requires much better vocalists than Germany now produces; men, especially, who do not sing in the throat, and can keep a voice fresh under hard work. One of the first results of the revolution in operatic music must be a revolution in the German methods of vocalism.




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